

# The communicating classroom: how much does it differ by school catchment?

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## Abstract

### **Background**

The Bercow Report (2008) highlighted the demand for the education system to support the high number of children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs. This may be of particular importance for schools who have a higher number of pupils from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds since the evidence for the relationship between lower SES and poorer language development is robust.

### **Aim**

The aim of this study was to investigate whether schools with more children from lower SES backgrounds were better at implementing strategies within the classroom to compensate for the higher number of children at risk of SLCN.

### **Methods**

The Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool (CSCOT) was used to measure the number of language supporting strategies used primary one classrooms in Northern Ireland. Eighteen schools participated in the study, nine 'low SES schools' and nine 'high SES schools', based on their free school meal percentage. A measure of three dimensions of a classrooms communication friendliness were obtained: the language learning environment, the language learning opportunities and the language learning interactions. Statistical analysis was conducted to see whether there was a significant difference in the number of strategies observed between the two groups of schools.

### **Results**

The results showed that schools from lower SES backgrounds performed significantly better on measures of the language learning environment and the language learning interactions but found no statistical difference in the number of language learning opportunities between the two groups.

### **Conclusions**

These results suggest that the education staff in schools of lower SES backgrounds were better at adapting the physical classroom environment as well as the manner in which they interact with their pupils to support their language development. Therefore, schools of lower SES are giving their pupils a better chance to catch up with the language development of their more advantaged peers.